

## THE NECESSITY FOR AN ACTIVE CAMPAIGN AGAINST VENEREAL DISEASES.\*

By DR. FRANCES M. GREENE.

A medical society becomes in a sense the conscience of the community which it represents. As a physician is responsible for the individual under his care, so have you become responsible for the aggregate of individuals, the public, whose physical well-being you have undertaken to safeguard. Therefore, I appear before you this evening to beg that your attention be directed to the great public need for an active crusade against venereal disease.

Syphilis since its first appearance in Europe at the end of the 15th century, has always been recognized as a grave disease, and every known means for its limitation and elimination has been tried, from burning the prostitute to regulating the traffic of her body as a recognized profession.

Ethical reformers have from time to time in this country headed crusades against prostitution. They made the serious error of attacking only the manifestation of the evil, and that on its weaker side, instead of seeking and destroying the causes which create and support it as an institution.

In Pittsburg, Penn., in 1891, the citizens of that place closed the houses of prostitution, turned the inmates out upon the streets, refusing them lodging and even food. (Dyer.) The injustice and futility of such a procedure illustrates the weakness of undirected ignorant popular opinion.

In 1892, Dr. Parkhurst, a minister of the gospel, decided to reform New York. He did succeed in causing the locality set apart by common consent for prostitutes to be cleared out. (Dyer.) Again the mistaken idea of prostitution. The result was to be foretold. Instead of a restricted plague spot, New York has disseminated plague spots.

All such methods of reform fail, because,—

1. No diseased condition was ever cured by treating only the symptoms.
2. They fail to make all parties concerned in an act responsible for it.
3. No appeal was made to the fundamental laws of equity and self-preservation by which public opinion can best be influenced.

The whole question lies deeper than prostitution itself. It lies in undirected, untempered human passions. Lies in an unawakened public conscience, in artificially cultivated ignorance, in secrecy, and in the disregard of individual responsibility.

The countries of Europe, with their older civilizations, their overcrowded cities and unfavorable economic conditions for the working classes, combined with the wave of indifference and decadence so seriously affecting their more prosperous social media, first awakened to the fact that something must be done.

It was in this spirit that the First International Congress for the prevention of syphilis and venereal diseases met for the purpose of discussion and mutual help in Brussels in 1899.

To this conference were invited delegates from governments, municipalities, physicians, lawyers, and such officials whose office presupposed an interest in public hygiene.

The first paragraph of the letter addressed to the invited delegates read as follows:

"The increasing spread of syphilis and venereal diseases has become a serious danger to society. It is necessary while it is still time to take measures for the purpose, if possible, of arresting the ever-increasing invasion of this scourge. In order to combine and unify all such efforts a committee has been formed and has decided to organize an International Conference for the Prophylaxis of Syphilis and Venereal Diseases."

At this first congress two of the delegates from the United States presented papers. Dr. S. Lustgarten of New Jersey read a short paper showing the impracticability of introducing laws regulating prostitution in the United States.

Dr. Isadore Dyer of New Orleans presented an exhaustive paper representing an enormous amount of labor and demonstrating that practically nothing had been done in the United States toward the recognition of the existence of such diseases. Dr. Dyer sent a list of inquiries based upon those issued by the secretary-general of the conference, Dr. Dubois Havernith, to all cities in the United States having 20,000 or more inhabitants. Of the 184 cities replies were received from only 69, and these furnished no data regarding venereal diseases.

To quote Dr. Dyer, "all opinions formulated by the health officer, police official or city mayor, or clerk have been drawn altogether from personal conviction, or else from the merest impression."

In his conclusion he states:

"The impression that stands out most strongly is that of the general public indifference to the question of prostitution, and the fact that it is relegated in almost all cities, (one only of those heard from excepted) to the police department, and is classed with vices, crime and nuisances."

What appalling ignorance of governments is this which places entirely in the hands of the most ignorant of its officials this source of the third great plague of the modern world!

Much time was devoted in this first congress to the discussion for and against the relementation of prostitution. This is of minor interest to us (since it is repugnant to the genius of our race) aside from the light it throws on conditions in other countries. I have since learned that the relementation of prostitution is being agitated in San Francisco and hope the matter will come to discussion.

I shall occupy your time only by touching upon such resolutions as were unanimously passed, and which apply to universal conditions.

The first resolution, proposed by Professor Fournier, who has perhaps done more to further the study of syphilis and the movement against it than any other man, and M. Jules le Jenne, the enlightened minister of the State of Belgium.

\* Read before the San Francisco County Medical Society, October 12, 1909.

*Resolved*—That the governments be called upon to use every means in their power to suppress the prostitution of minors. In view of the following statistics this is of importance to us. The legal age of consent in the United States was at that time—

In three states 10 years.  
In four states 12 years.  
In three states 13 years.  
In twenty states 14 years.  
In three states 15 years.  
In twelve states 16 years.  
In one state 17 years.

In California it was then fourteen years, since raised to sixteen.

A group of well-known men, among them Fournier, Parlov, Jonathan Hutchinson, Lesser Neisser, and others whose experience has found a striking lack of preparation in the medical profession, were sponsors for the next resolution.

*Resolved*—That governments be urgently recommended to secure a more complete education in these subjects to their medical students, by making courses with specialists and examinations by specialists obligatory.

The enormous importance added by Noeggerath to gonorrhea, making it responsible for from 60 to 80 per cent of pelvic diseases in women, Fournier's authority for the relation of Parasyphilitic diseases to Syphilis causing extension of treatment to four or five years, the possibility of an heredity to the second generation, have raised the question of venereal diseases to one of the first importance in the study of medicine.

Burleaux insists that young physicians should be sent into practice so thoroughly cognizant of the importance of venereal diseases that no matter what they may be called upon to treat, the possibility of a specific origin should always present itself to them.

Further resolutions of interest to us because they show that the needs of the movement can only be met by combined action, are:

No. VII, proposed by Professor Lassar, Berlin: Governments are urged to draw attention of the youth to the dangers of prostitution and the sinister results of venereal diseases.

No. VIII favors a uniform manner of compiling statistics in all countries.

It remained for the second International Congress, held in Brussels in 1902, to finally be unanimously convinced that the most important and efficacious means of combating the diffusion of venereal diseases consists in a widespread popularization of knowledge relative to the dangers connected with the maladies.

Above all should the masculine youth be taught that not only are chastity and continence not injurious, but that these virtues are most important and desirable from the medical standpoint. (Neisser.)

The conference also recommended that the problem of rational and progressive education in the matter of sex from a hygienic and moral point of view be submitted to the teachers and educators of all classes.

These resolutions, unanimously arrived at after great difference of opinion, lively debate, and mature

deliberation of world-renowned specialists in medicine, assisted by distinguished men in other important positions of public trust, served as inspirations for the national societies formed in every country in Europe, and for the first efforts in this work, in the United States.

The work of the societies in Europe has assumed an importance that has forced the approbation, and in most countries, the co-operation of the government.

I regret that we have not time to follow in its developments the pioneer work in the opening of a new era in public health. The first move in this country was made by Dr. Prince Morrow, whose able paper before the New York County Medical Society inspired it to the appointment of the Committee of Seven to study measures for the prophylaxis of venereal diseases, and in 1905 to unanimously endorse a plea for the organization of a society for this purpose.

The first American Society of Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis was organized in 1905 under the able leadership of Dr. Prince Morrow, in New York. It began with 20, and now numbers 400 members.

In 1906 the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Social Disease was founded. It has a membership of 800. A very significant fact is that two Philadelphia daily papers report the meetings of the society.

The Chicago society, organized in 1906, numbers 250 active members. Similar societies exist in Baltimore, Detroit, Milwaukee, Indianapolis and Jacksonville. In San Jose, under the auspices of the California Public Health Association, was founded in April, 1909, the California State Association for the Study and Prevention of Syphilis and Gonorrhea.

We are very far from these centers of active work. Our population is composed for a large part of a foreign element and their descendants still close to traditions of the home countries. The "Spirit of '49" is the common expression which designates that recklessness of consequences so characteristic of the native.

We possess as yet no statistics, but no physician who has practiced medicine in San Francisco will doubt the necessity for active interference.

The International and National Congresses have been a great benefit in bringing to light the conditions leading to and surrounding venereal infection, both through sexual and non-sexual channels. They are the prototypes of a society of which there is great need here. No evil can be combated if we do not simply, openly, and in all honesty discuss it. Darkness, mystery and disguise are the best media for the cultivation of moral as well as physical bacteria. We all know what has been done for tuberculosis and alcoholism. This third great scourge can only be controlled if we can drag it from the secrecy in which both the medical profession and the laymen have so long persisted in keeping it, and open it to the healthy action of perfect understanding and public discussion of ways and means.

Another result of scientific statistical investigation and open discussion is one which if properly used is likely to prove an important factor in changing the attitude of the general public toward these diseases. I refer to the large percentage of innocents who contract venereal diseases. Fournier gives the percentage in his private practice of wives who contract syphilis innocently from their husbands as 20; Morrow, in dispensary practice, as 70; in more civilized countries 10 to 20 per cent is contracted accidentally; in Russia, accidental-non-sexual, as high as 70 per cent; in pelvic diseases of women 40 to 80 per cent. Add to this that the average age at which young men acquire venereal diseases is, according to Fournier, from the 19th to 23rd year. (In this country where the youth have more freedom, we may set the age as younger by several years.) From a really moral standpoint, these victims of temptation too strong for their years, unprepared and ignorant of the dangers awaiting them, are as innocent as those whose infection was accidental. With the assistance of such statistics and a logical, just and humanitarian conviction that these diseases are not shame diseases, since most of the sufferers are the victims of ignorance, false education and false social conditions, we can safely approach the public of both sexes.

I believe with Professor du Claux, the successor to Pasteur, who says that a fight against venereal disease will only be possible when we can arrive at the point of view that the sufferers are not guilty but unfortunate.

I quote Professor Finger of Vienna: "Society should be taught that instead of being ashamed of and not fearing these diseases, they ought not to be ashamed of, but fear them."

The responsibility in these matters is becoming too heavy for the enlightened physician. Considering the widespread consequences of venereal disease professional secrecy, to the honorable physician, is often being strained to a point where it is impossible for him to decide upon the lines of a tradition inapplicable to present conditions.

The growth of such movements as Christian Science and the Emmanuel Movement is a symptom of a growing distrust of our profession.

If we wish to preserve the honor of the medical profession intact we cannot afford to be silent. We can ill afford to take no cognizance of scientific and sociological development. We must not allow the laymen to think that we are guarding as a secret and using for the purpose of commercial gain, the knowledge of diseases which are so widespread in their consequences, so difficult of cure, and of which the prophylaxis is of so great an importance.

As long as physicians still treat gonorrhea with cynical humor; as long as they send fifteen-year-old boys to prostitutes because they have had a few emissions; when, in spite of the consensus of scientific opinion to the contrary, they still continue to believe that almost with the first night emissions a lad is sufficiently developed for sexual intercourse, we shall deserve the hard things that are said about us.

Our educators are alive to the gravity of the sit-

uation and look to us, as possessors of the knowledge, to make the first move. It is natural that the first impetus should come from the medical profession. Nothing effective was done in the movement against alcohol until all sentimentality was dropped and the subject was treated scientifically. The morality of a movement whose object it is to protect the individual, the family, the nation and the race, speaks for itself.

The first steps toward the solution of the problem have already been suggested to us, viz:

1. The dissipation of public ignorance on the subject.
2. The proper sex education for the young of both sexes.
3. The stimulation of physicians to a deeper study of the subject.
4. The destruction of the antiquated opinion that chastity in young men is injurious.
5. The co-operation of educators and legislators in this common cause.

I cannot more fittingly close this appeal than all earnest men and women help in the first active steps in this direction, than by quoting from Thomas Huxley, who sacrificed his own scientific ambition in order to popularize science and to develop and organize scientific education: "To promote the increase of natural knowledge and to forward the application of scientific methods of investigation to all the problems of life to the best of my ability, in the conviction which has grown with my growth and strengthened with my strength, that there is no alleviation for the sufferings of mankind except through veracity of thought and action, and resolute facing of the world as it is."

#### DR. H. H. RUSBY ON IMPURE DRUGS. AN ADDRESS BEFORE THE PHYSICIANS OF REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA.

An interesting little gathering of physicians and pharmacists occurred on Tuesday evening, August 24th, at the office of Dr. Hoell Tyler, at Redlands, this state, when an address was made by Dr. Henry H. Rusby, Dean of the College of Pharmacy of Columbia University, in the City of New York, and president of the American Pharmaceutical Association. The occasion was that of a visit by Dr. Rusby to his old friend, Dr. Tyler, they having been associates on the medical staff of the New York City Lunatic Asylum in 1883-1884. Dr. Tyler celebrated the occasion by asking his numerous medical and pharmaceutical friends in Redlands and surrounding towns to join in welcoming his guest.

Dr. Rusby took for his subject the existing defects in the quality of medicaments, which have recently attracted such great attention, and the best means for their removal, and spoke as follows:

I have just concluded a tour of inspection of